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ABSTRACT

A descriptive study used survey methodology to determine first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations toward reading and students' attitudes toward reading, as well as structured classroom observations to describe teachers' reading instructional practices. Subjects, 259 of the 428 first-grade teachers (61%) in 94 elementary schools of a large mid-south metropolitan public school system returned usable survey data. A stratified sample of 15 teachers, 5 from each orientation (phonics, skills, and whole language), were randomly selected for classroom observation and interviews. Results indicated that: (1) the majority of teachers (219, or 84.59%) held a skills theoretical orientation to reading, while only eight (3.10%) held a whole language theoretical orientation to reading; (2) 60% of the teachers observed (including all five teachers with a skills orientation) taught reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientation to reading; (3) 73% of the teachers observed used basal/skills strategies; (4) all teachers used a variety of instructional strategies to teach reading; (5) all teachers consistently identified their own classroom experiences as the single most important influence in what they believed about reading and reading instruction; and (6) there was no significant difference in students' reading attitude with respect to teachers' theoretical orientation to reading and reading instruction. Findings suggest that the provision of practical strategies without theory may lead to misimplementation or no implementation at all, unless teachers' beliefs are congruent with the theoretical assumptions of the practice. (Ten tables of data are included; 46 references are attached.) (RS)

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Match or Mismatch:

Relationship between First-Grade Teachers' Theoretical Orientation to Reading and Their Reading Instructional Practices

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Introduction

Beginning reading has long been a source of concern and research interest for teachers. In fact, reading is the most researched of all subjects in elementary schools (Chall, 1983). When to start reading instruction, how to teach beginning reading, and what is the best way to teach a young child to read are the issues that have been debated with intense fervor and considerable rancor over the years. And now parents, teachers, reading specialists, and researchers are still searching for the best and most appropriate approach to beginning reading instruction. Historically, a variety of methods have been developed (Chall, 1967), including look-and-say whole word method, language experience approach, programmed reading, individualized reading, and systematic phonics instruction. However, it seems that no two people agree on an answer about the one best method. In her influential book "Learning to Read: The Great Debate", Chall (1983) cautiously admits,

> One of the most important things, if not the most important thing, I learned from studying the existing research on beginning reading is that it says nothing consistently. It says too much about some things, too little about others. And if you select judiciously and avoid interpretations, you can make the research 'prove' almost anything you want it to (p. 87).

Dissatisfied in part with traditional approaches and in reaction to current beginning reading practices dominated by phonics, basal reading series, and workbooks (Freeman & Hatch, 1989; Hollingsworth, Reutzel, & Weeks, 1990), and most importantly based on current research and knowledge about how children learn to read, teachers/educators launched a grass-roots whole language movement in the early 80s. Its appeal caught on, and it seems everywhere one turns these days, someone has something to say about "whole language." The term whole language has become a common buzzword for most educators and is a prominent theme in journal articles, books, conference presentations, publisher's advertising, and the media. A simple reason behind the spreading enthusiasm for whole language, as Mckenna, Robinson, and Miller (1990) point out, is that "teachers find its rationale appealing,

empowering, refreshingly child-centered, and intuitively correct" (p. 3). According to Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores (1987),

> Whole language is based on the following ideas: (a) language is for making meanings, for accomplishing purposes; (b) written language is language - thus what is true for language in general is true for written language; (c) the cuing systems of language . . . are always simultaneously present and interacting in any instance of language in use; (d) language use always occurs in a situation; (e) situations are critical to meaning-making. (p. 154)

However, the term whole language has become broadly defined and loosely used in the professional literature. The definitions are often vague and elusive. According to Goodman (1986), whole language is a set of beliefs about how language learning happens and a set of principles to guide classroom practice, and "a whole language program is an educational program conducted by whole language teachers" (p. 5). Bird (1987) describes whole language as " a way of thinking, a way of living and learning with children in the classroom" (p. 4). Watson (1989) defines whole language as "a perspective on education" (p. 133), and Newman (1985) believes whole language is a philosophical stance. In an attempt to construct a definition for whole language, Bergeron (1990) analyzed existing literature pertaining to whole language instruction in elementary classrooms and defined whole language as "a concept that embodies both a philosophy of language development as well as the instructional approaches embodied within, and supportive of, that philosophy" (p. 319). According to Watson (1989), there are three reasons for the difficulty in defining whole language. One is that advocates of whole language reject a dictionary-type definition, and another is that strong emotions against or for whole language make communication between its advocates and opponents potentially difficult. Finally, the experts in whole language, the teachers, who can provide the richest answers have not yet been adequately tapped for their input.

Because of such a diversity in definition and inconsistencies within educational literature relating to the concept of whole language, it is no surprise that the relative effectiveness of whole language is very much inconclusive and often controversial. The great debate on the best method to teach beginning reading is

therefore still going on. In an article on faddism in education, Slavin (1989) discusses the tendency in education toward faddism known as the "swinging pendulum," and points out,

> If education is ever to make serious general progress, educators must somehow stop the pendulum by focusing their efforts to improve education on programs that are effective, rather on those that are merely new and sound good. (p. 758)

In recent years, research concerning the relationship between teachers' thinking and beliefs and instructional practice is attracting increasing attention. Current research on teacher thinking assumes that: "1) practice is greatly influenced by teacher thinking; 2) teaching is guided by thoughts and judgments; and 3) teaching is a high-level decision-making process" (Isenberg, 1990, p. 322). These assumptions portray teachers as active, engaging and rational professionals who make both conscious and intuitive decisions in school context. It is also suggested that the thinking of teachers constitutes a large part of the psychological context of teaching and that practice is "substantially influenced and even determined by teachers' underlying thinking" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 255).

Recent research on reading instructional methods also indicates that the most important variable in instructional effectiveness is the teacher rather than the method or material (Duffy, 1977). For instance, after an attempt to discover the best approach to initial reading instruction Bond and Dykstra (1967) state,

> . . . no one approach is so distinctively better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively. . . . To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials. (p. 11)

Based on their extensive work with reading teachers, Harste and Burke (1977) proposed that "it is the teacher who makes the difference" and hypothesized that "the key component of the teacher variable is the teacher's theoretical orientation" (p. 34). They operationally defined teacher's theoretical orientation as "a particular knowledge and belief system about reading which strongly

influences critical decision-making related to both the teaching and learning of reading" (p. 34). According to Harste and Burke (1977), both teachers and learners hold particular and identifiable theoretical orientations about reading and those orientations significantly effect experiences, goals, behavior, and outcomes. Weaver (1988) further suggests:

> Children's success at reading reflects their reading strategies; their reading strategies typically reflect their implicit definitions of reading; children's definitions of reading often reflect the instructional approach; and the instructional approach reflects a definition of reading, whether implicit or explicit. (p. 2)

Although many people (Harste & Burke, 1977; Kamil & Pearson, 1979; Weaver, 1988) have proposed or supposed the relationship between teachers' theoretical orientation and their reading instructional practice, empirical investigation of the relationship has been limited and is comparatively new. Only in recent years have some reading researchers empirically examined the relationship between what teachers believe about reading instruction and what they actually do in classrooms (Bawden, 1979; Bawden & Duffy, 1979; DeFord, 1978; Duffy, 1977; Duffy & Anderson, 1982; Gove, 1981; Harste & Burke, 1977; Hoffman & Kugle, 1982; Lehman, Allen & Freeman, 1990; Levande, 1989; Rupley & Logan, 1985; Watson, 1984). These studies have produced opposing and inconclusive results. Some studies (DeFord, 1978; Gove, 1981; Harste & Burke, 1977; Lehman et al., 1990; Rupley & Logan, 1984; Watson, 1984) showed a strong and direct relationship between what teachers believe and what they actually do. Other studies (Bawden, 1979; Duffy & Anderson, 1982; Hoffman & Kugle, 1981; Allen & Freeman, 1990; Levande, 1989) found factors other than theoretical orientation to be of paramount importance in determining how teachers teach reading. The relationships among the factors that influence the manner in which teachers teach reading have not been clearly established. As Pace and Powers suggest (1981), ". . . the complex relationships among teachers' beliefs in many areas and their instructional decisions deserve further and more extensive study" (p. 108).

For teacher educators interested in changing classroom practices to reflect current research and knowledge in learning generally and reading in particular, it is important to understand the factors that influence classroom teachers in their selection of instructional strategies and materials. If teachers teach reading in the way consistent with what they believe about reading and reading instruction, then it may be possible for teacher educators to affect change by influencing teachers' theoretical orientation during preservice professional training and inservice staff development. Efforts could focus on changing teachers' theoretical orientation to be more consonant with current knowledge and recent research on the teaching and learning of reading. On the other hand, if factors more than theoretical orientation influence instruction, then it may not be sufficient to just change teachers' theoretical orientation, and it would become necessary to identify, understand and consider those additional variables before any real change in teaching practice can happen.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was (1) to determine first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations toward reading, (2) to investigate the relationships between first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations to reading, their reading instructional practices and students' attitudes toward reading, and (3) to examine the factors that have influenced teachers' beliefs about reading and their reading instructional practices. This study was guided by the following major research questions and hypotheses.

Questions:

1. What are first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations to reading?
2. Are first-grade teachers' instructional practices consistent with their theoretical orientations to reading during the teaching of reading?
3. What factors have influenced teachers' beliefs about reading and their reading instructional practices?

Hypotheses:

1. Students in classrooms with teachers who have a whole language theoretical orientation as indicated by TORP will have a more positive attitude towards reading as assessed by Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) than students in classrooms with teachers who have a phonics or skills theoretical orientations.

2. Students in classrooms with teachers who have whole language practices as indicated by the Moss Classroom Analysis of Teacher's Theoretical Orientation to Reading (CATTOR) will have a more positive attitude towards reading as assessed by ERAS than students in classrooms with teachers who have phonics or skills practices.

Methodology

This descriptive study utilized survey methodology to determine first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations toward reading and students' attitudes toward reading, as well as structured classroom observations to describe teachers' reading instructional practices. Combining survey data with observational data permitted the description of teaching practices and students' attitudes toward reading within each theoretical orientation to reading. Structured teacher interviews were also used to uncover factors influencing teachers' beliefs about reading and their reading instructional practices.

The population for the study was the 428 first grade teachers who were teaching in the 94 elementary schools of a large Mid-South metropolitan public school system during the 1991-92 school year. All teachers were mailed a cover letter explaining the study, a demographic information form and the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile developed by DeFord (1985). Two hundred fifty-nine (61%) of the teachers returned usable data sets and became the subjects for the study. Next, the teachers who returned the TORP were classified as having either a phonics, skills or whole language orientation to reading. A stratified sample of 15 teachers, five from each orientation (phonics, skills and whole language) were then randomly selected for participation in the teacher practices part of the study. Each teacher selected was teaching in a different school and was observed while teaching reading using the Moss Classroom Analysis of Teachers' Theoretical

Orientation to Reading (CATTOR) on three separate occasions for 30 minutes. This resulted in 90 minutes of observation per teacher for a total of 1,350 minutes across the 45 observations. After all classroom observations were completed, the 15 participating teachers were individually interviewed using the Teacher Interview Schedule (TIS). The TIS focused on two areas: (1) the criteria used for selecting their reading program and materials; and (2) the factors which have influenced their beliefs about reading and reading instruction. The sample of students were the 310 students in the classrooms of the teachers participating in the observational part of the study. To collect the student data, each classroom was visited after the classroom observations were over and the students were administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) developed by McKenna and Kear (1990). Descriptive statistics were used to characterize teachers' theoretical orientations and instructional practices. A one-factor hierarchical analysis of variance was used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Question 1: What are first-grade teachers' theoretical orientations to reading?

Despite repeated efforts by the researcher, only 259 teachers (61%) completed the TORP in a manner that could be used to generate useful data. The results of the respondents' surveys on the DeFord Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile are summarized in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the largest number of respondents (n = 219, 84.59%) indicated a skills orientation. A lesser number (n = 32, 12.4%) revealed a phonics orientation; and the smallest number of respondents (n = 8, 3.1%) indicated a whole language orientation.

Table 1
Mean TORP Score, Number, and Percent of Teachers by Theoretical Orientation

Theoretical Orientation	n	Mean	S.D.	Percent
Phonics	32	59.16	5.67	12.40
Skills	219	80.22	7.92	84.59
Whole Language	8	103.88	2.64	3.10
Total	259	78.35	11.22	100

The survey responses were also analyzed using multiple correlational analysis procedure to explore relationships between teachers' TORP scores and teachers' race, age, educational level, degree time, training in reading instruction, training time, class size, and students' SES level. Table 2 presents teachers' mean TORP scores, standard deviations, and numbers and percentages of teachers in phonics, skills, and whole language orientation by teachers' race, age, education, degree time, training, training time, class size, and students' SES level. Results of the multiple correlational analyses are summarized in Table 3.

Table 2
TQRP Score, Number and Percent of Teachers in Each Theoretical Orientation by Race, Age, Education, Degree Time, Training, Training Time, Class Size, and Student SES level

	TQRP Score		Theoretical Orientation			Total	
	Mean	St.D.	Phonics	Skills	WL	n	%
Race							
White	79.48	10.04	16	152	4	172	70.20
Black	76.17	13.21	13	53	3	69	28.20
Other	78.75	6.95	0	4	0	4	1.6
To al	78.54	11.05	29	209	7	245	100
Age							
< 35	82.36	6.91	1	58	1	60	26.70
36-50	78.44	9.96	14	107	5	116	56.00
> 51	75.24	8.26	6	32	1	39	17.30
Total	79.30	10.44	21	197	7	225	100
Education							
Bachelor	79.45	11.61	13	103	5	121	47.50
Master	77.69	10.54	14	97	3	114	44.70
Other	77.10	11.14	3	17	0	20	7.80
Total	78.48	11.10	30	217	8	255	100
Degree Time							
< 1970	77.21	12.14	7	31	1	39	15.50
1971-80	77.42	11.33	14	83	4	101	40.10
> 1981	79.99	10.43	8	101	3	112	44.40
Total	78.53	11.10	29	215	8	252	100

(Table 2 continued)

	TORP Score		Theoretical Orientation			Total	
	Mean	St.D.	Phonics	Skills	WL	n	%
Training							
None	90.67	16.17	0	2	1	3	1.20
One	77.11	10.25	7	38	0	45	17.90
Two	79.03	12.71	9	65	3	77	30.60
Three	77.61	10.61	14	96	4	114	45.20
Four	82.69	9.10	1	12	0	13	5.20
Total	78.37	11.29	31	213	8	252	100
Training Time							
< 1970	74.50	8.19	1	5	0	6	2.40
1971-80	79.19	9.79	3	32	1	36	14.6
> 1981	78.37	11.39	25	174	6	205	83.00
Total	78.39	11.09	29	211	7	247	100
Class Size							
< 15	85.22	15.41	2	10	1	13	5.10
16-25	78.96	10.89	27	177	5	209	82.60
> 26	74.53	10.43	3	27	1	31	12.30
Total	78.17	11.20	32	214	7	253	100
Student SES							
Low	79.12	10.43	14	115	2	131	52.40
Lower Mid	77.60	12.03	11	71	5	87	34.8
Middle	77.10	12.88	7	23	1	31	12.40
Upper Mid	66	0	0	1	0	1	.40
Total	78.29	11.32	32	210	8	250	100

Table 3
Correlations between Teachers' TORP Scores and Their Race, Age, Education, Degree Time, Amount of Training, Training Time, Class Size, and Students' SES Level.

	n	TORP Score
Race	245	-.12
Age	255	-.16*
Education	255	-.08
Degree Time	252	.11
Training	252	.00
Training Time	247	.01
Class Size	253	-.09
Student SES	250	-.08

* Significant at .05

As indicated in Table 3, there was a weak but statistically significant negative correlation between teachers' TORP score and teachers' age ($r = -.16$, $df = 253$, $p<.05$), which suggests that older teachers tend to score lower on the TORP profile and younger teachers tend to score higher. This means that older teachers tend to approach a phonics orientation and younger teachers tend to approach a whole language theoretical orientation. It was also found that there was no significant linear relationship between teachers' TORP score and teachers' race, education level, degree time, training, training time, class size, and student SES level. None significant relationship between training time and teachers' theoretical orientation may be partially due to the fact that teacher training in Memphis on whole language is relatively new. Whole language philosophy and its practical applications were just introduced to the school district in the mid-80s.

Question 2: Are first-grade teachers' reading instructional practices consistent with their theoretical orientations to reading during the teaching of reading?

Table 4 summarizes participating teachers' TORP scores, theoretical orientations to reading, and the percentages of their observed reading instructional practices. As Table 4 demonstrates, all 15 teachers, regardless of their self-reported theoretical orientations, actually exhibited all three categories of reading instructional practices - phonics, skills, and whole language. However, they differed in the amount of instructional behaviors in each category.

Table 4
Teachers' Theoretical Orientation to Reading Indicated by TORP, Percentage of Their Observed Reading Instructional Practices by CATTOR, and Consistency between Orientation and Practice

Teacher	TORP	Theoretical Orientation	Instructional Practice			Consistent(+) Inconsistent(-)
			Phonics %	Skills %	WL %	
1	48	Phonics	28.02	38.65	33.33	-
2	52	Phonics	18.81	48.62	32.57	-
3	52	Phonics	7.44	61.16	31.40	-
4	58	Phonics	6.15	30.43	57.97	-
5	61	Phonics	53.68	25.00	21.32	+
Mean	54.2		22.82	40.70	37.30	
6	76	Skills	27.43	50.29	22.29	+
7	81	Skills	14.29	74.73	10.99	+
8	83	Skills	30.29	37.98	31.73	+
9	88	Skills	16.22	45.41	38.39	+
10	93	Skills	15.53	43.48	40.99	+
Mean	84.2		21.80	47.40	30.70	
11	101	WL	16.67	47.62	35.71	-
12	101	WL	8.16	50.34	41.50	-
13	102	WL	12.04	25.00	62.96	+
14	104	WL	6.54	31.37	62.09	+
15	105	WL	21.77	32.65	45.58	+
Mean	102.6		12.90	37.70	49.30	

Table 5 shows the number of teachers observed teaching reading in ways consistent and inconsistent with their self-reported theoretical orientation as indicated by TORP.

Table 5
Numbers of Teachers Observed as Consistent and Inconsistent with Their TORP Profile

	Phonics	Skills	Whole Language	Total
Consistent	1	5	3	9
Inconsistent	4	0	2	6
Total	5	5	5	15

As Table 5 reveals, only 60% of the teachers observed in this study were found to be teaching reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientation to reading as indicated by their response to the TORP profile. Specifically, as indicated in Table 3, all five teachers (6-10) with a self-reported TORP score indicative of a skills orientation, three teachers (13-15) with a whole language orientation, and only one teacher (5) with a phonics theoretical orientation to reading were found to be teaching reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientation. Two teachers (1, 2) with a phonics orientation and two teachers (11, 12) with a whole language orientation were observed to be teaching reading using largely the skills approach which is inconsistent with their theoretical orientation to reading instruction. They used a basal reading system and closely adhered to the instructional sequence in the teacher's manual which seemed to follow a typical skills scope and sequence emphasizing basic reading skills.

All the teachers who were observed exhibiting largely skills instructional practices teach in schools in which a particular basal reading program is mandated. Supervisors and administrators control the selection and use of programs and materials and teachers are given a program and expected to follow it. During interviews concerning the criteria teachers used for selecting their reading program and material, these teachers all consistently mentioned the

controlling role of the administration in the school system. It seemed that teachers' efforts to satisfy perceived administrative concerns drives them and influences their instructional practices. As one teacher suggests,

> Your supervisor could drop in any time. They know what you are supposed to do and they know how it should be taught. You have to really keep it in your head that you do this first and then this, make sure you cover the skills when you do the story. Every six weeks, they give us a sheet and tell us what we are supposed to be doing and what is supposed to be done. That's why we are supposed to stay on it. (Teacher #3)

The teachers observed teaching reading with largely a skills approach also indicated that the reading program mandated by the school system has a fairly comprehensive package. This point can be well represented in a teacher's comments on the reading program,

> You have everything you need to go with the program. We have charts; we have ditto sheets; we have workbooks, text, videos, teacher's book, and everything. There is nothing in my book, the teacher's manual, that I don't know what to do because it tells you exactly what to do with the program, how and when to use the kit, when to use the workbook, and when to do the worksheets. . . . We have everything we need in this program. (Teacher #2)

For the four teachers, one with phonics theoretical orientation and three with whole language orientation, who were observed teaching reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientation, the consistence may be attributed to their freedom to choose their own reading materials and reading instructional strategies. They had their school principal's permission and support to make their own choice. They could better articulate their beliefs about how reading should be taught in first grade and had stronger motivation to implement their own ideas.

> In this particular school, as long as my children master the skills, I have a lot of freedom. I think the principal trusts me. He knows I am going to do my job and take it seriously. So he really has given me a free hand. (Teacher #13)

Question 3: What factors have influenced teachers' beliefs about reading and their reading instructional practices?

In their responses to the question, "How did you come to decide on this particular reading program for your class?" teachers with an observed skills orientation consistently reported that the decisions to use specific programs and materials were made by others rather than themselves. The following excerpts from the interviews are representative of their responses:

> No one person decides on this particular program. The program we are using now . . . was brought to the school district. The school district has a 'Textbook Committee', and these people decide on which curriculum we are going to use in reading, math, science, and those areas. So this is the series they decided to go with. I did not have a say-so in this. Basically, once the program is adopted in the schools, you go with the books they have bought and we teach with them. (Teacher #2)
>
> (Once a program is adopted), we usually have workshops and they teach you how to use the books. It's broken down in your book what to do. In the teacher's book, they teach you exactly how you teach reading. It's broken down each day. It tells you what to teach, what to do, and the objectives are already there in the book, and all you have to do is follow what's in the book. It tells what book page to do, what chart to do, and it tells all what you need to do. You are supposed to follow the rules, you know. (Teacher #3)
>
> This is from the Board. The Board has a curriculum that we are to function by, so I have everything that's relating to the curriculum and I use the curriculum. . . . The curriculum tells you everything to do. (Teacher #1)
>
> I don't have a choice in this matter. This is what we were told by the administration. You will teach this way, and this is the manual you will use, and this is the program you will use, and you will do it. I just follow what they tell me to follow. The manual provides a format. They tell us what order these skills are taught. I use their reading workbook. I just follow their sequence of skills. (Teacher #7)
>
> The program was decided by the Board of Education. We had no choice. (Teacher #11)

> When you are in a situation, like with the City Schools, they are mandatory that you have to teach this, you have to teach that. It does not leave you open to create your own curriculum. You cannot do whole language when you are mandated and told what you have to teach. Your day is pretty well set. They have curriculum and they tell you what you are going to teach, when you are going to teach it, how long you teach it. That decision is not left to teachers anymore. (Teacher #8)

These comments indicate that teachers in this study who were observed using a skills reading program had no choice in selecting the reading program and materials to use for reading instruction. The Board of Education, the principal, the supervisor, or staff development trainer designated by the school system told them what form of reading instruction was expected in their classroom. The teachers played a very passive role in the decision-making concerning material and program selection, which leaves little room for individual teachers' autonomy and creativity. As the observations revealed, in many of the classrooms teachers simply hold the teacher's manual in their hands and go with it strictly step by step when teaching reading. Teachers in this situation also seemed to feel uncomfortable, powerless, and frustrated.

In contrast, the phonics teacher and the whole language teachers in this study, who were observed teaching reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientations rather than using a skills approach, when questioned about the criteria they used for material and program selection, described the support from the principal and fellow teachers as an advantage.

> I have been interested in teaching reading for all of my career, and I am always looking for something that is better than what I am currently using. . . . I found out about this program through some colleagues at another school. I went to a (workshop on this program) . . . I was then determined to try this with my students. So I came back to school and I asked my principal if he would please give permission to use this program. My principal gave me permission, and the assistant principal became interested and she was the one who got our school adopted into this program. (Teacher #5)

> In this particular school, as long as my children master the skills, I have a lot of freedom. I think the principal trusts me.

He knows I am going to do my job and take it seriously. So he really has given me a free hand. He has not really said, 'I don't like what you do. You need to do this, and we need to start the basal.' So I feel like I have a lot of freedom in this particular school. But that depends on the principal to a degree. No one has come to me and said, 'You can't use trade books. You have to use this workbook.' I have a lot of freedom as long as the requirements are met on the tests. (Teacher #13)

I think the key is learning how to adapt the program to your children. I am so lucky. In this classroom, I have so much autonomy, much more control. (Teacher #4)

These comments reveal that teachers in this study who can teach reading in a manner consistent with their beliefs about reading seem to have more freedom in making decisions regarding what reading program and materials to use in their own classroom. They felt empowered to explore an innovative way to teach reading. These teachers did not simply follow the teacher's manual step by step, rather they designed their own activities, went at their own pace, and used a variety of strategies in an innovative way. In addition, teachers who were observed teaching reading from a whole language orientation tended to take a stronger professional stand on what they believe about reading and how reading should be taught, and played a more active role in the decision-making. They did not simply take what was given to them as the mandatory reading program and materials, rather they took the matter into their own hands and stood with what they believed was right for them and their children. They seemed to be more confident, creative, and autonomous. This point can be well highlighted by the following statements.

When the system is wrong, we have to question the system. We cannot just go along with it and say, 'OK, well, the principal tells me to do this and this person tells me to do that.' This is not good enough. If you are a professional and you know what's going on in the classroom, you have to stand up and say, 'Excuse me, but this does not fit my children. This is not meeting our needs.' So I think we get to do more than we have been willing to do. Teachers have to take a stronger stand. They get to make sure that they are given textbooks that are appropriate to their children and programs that do fit. If they don't fit, don't just push children through. (Teacher#4)

> In the past, I felt like I had to do things that everybody else told me. But I realized that it was my classroom and I had to help my children succeed, so it's up to me to think about ways and to incorporate those ways. Now it's more different from what it was. Before it was more traditional, structured, and they used workbooks and ditto sheets. And I just realized it was not going to work and I had to do something else. . . . I use the series in addition to what I want to do. I take their ideas and incorporate them into what I think will work. I don't just follow the guidelines step by step. I am not a robot. I don't do everything they have. I use those ones my children need. (Teacher #14)

In their responses to the question, "What things have been most crucial in influencing your beliefs about reading instruction?" most teachers, regardless of their theoretical orientation or actual reading instructional practice, reported their classroom experiences as having a strong influence on their beliefs about how reading should be taught. The following quotations are just a sample of their expressions.

> Experience working with children and finding out. I have had children come to me and had no phonetics understanding . . . could not hear the sounds, and so it was just sight words. The child was able to take sight words home and to learn them. . . . So my belief is that there are some that are going to get sight words and some will get it from phonetical sounds. So it's through experience, you know. Just working with children and finding out that they can get it both ways, that you should have an avenue where if the child can't get it within this frame, they can get it from something else. So it has to be a combination of things, and find out what works with that child or with the group that you have. It's just through experience. (Teacher #1)

> My own classroom experiences. When I started teaching reading, the supervisor told me to follow the teacher's manual that came with the series that was currently been used, and I tried to do that. But at that particular time in that particular series, the teacher was told that it wasn't important for children to learn letter names and that children learn by sight to read. But I feel that my 23 years of experiences have shown that is wrong. It is important for children to learn the

names of the alphabet, and it is important for them to learn phonetical principles, the sounds those letters make. Those are two things that I have found out in my real experiences are just essential. (Teacher #5)

I think it is experience, trial and error. . . . I just think that's trying and using all different materials in a lot of different ways. It's just been through trying and implementing different ways to teaching and seeing what really works and sticking with it, try to improve. Through experience you should improve. I like to try new things, and I do try. I do know what's tried and true, and pick the things that would work, add them to the things I already know do work, and make it as successful as possible. I spend a lot of time on simple, simple things for the first semester of the basic fundamentals of reading in phonics, sight words vocabulary. (Teacher #6)

Experience. Just working with children. I like the control of vocabulary. It's from experience. It's trial-and-error. You try something and if it works, you keep doing it again. You try something that don't work, so you throw it away and try another approach. I have been to workshops and heard people say, 'Try this, try that.' I try it to see if it works. Just basic experience. (Teacher #8)

I think it's just experience and children themselves. I mean it depends on your group, and you have to be flexible in what you do because what works this year might not work next year with that particular group. If I have a group of children coming in and reading the first book, there is no way I am going to use the same approach on that particular group of children as opposite to another group. (Teacher #15)

Just trial and error through the years, you know. Having dealt with different children, it's just an experience thing. Plus, I have children in my home. I watch my children how they learn differently. I just sit back and watch, and how I can reach that child. And I try an idea and it worked. . . . Now a new trend is called whole language. I have not had any training, but from what I hear, I have been doing it already. I didn't know the name for it. I just do what I think works. I like the whole language idea. When I first started out, I often heard different things. One person says they get to learn

> phonics. If they don't learn how to sound out words, they cannot read. And another person says something else. I keep watching these children. I found this child does not learn this way and this one does, so I get to try some different things with different kids. (Teacher #14)

It is apparent that teachers from all three theoretical orientations identify their classroom experiences as profoundly influencing their beliefs about reading and reading instruction. Teachers in this study reported that through experience they were able to know "what works" and "what doesn't work" regarding reading instruction. It is also clear that "what works" depends on the individual teacher's interpretation of what "reading" actually means.

Some teachers felt that the preservice professional preparation they received was inadequate to prepare them for the challenge of teaching in real classrooms. They reported their own experiences and the advice they received from experienced fellow teachers in addition to their preservice training as having influenced their beliefs about how reading should be taught. In some cases, teachers also identified in-service workshops, college courses, professional literature, and the types of materials and programs they are exposed to as influential factors in the formation of their beliefs about reading instruction.

Several teachers also suggested that there should not be just one clear-cut approach to the teaching of reading. They felt that teachers should use a variety of teaching strategies, "a combination of things," "a little bit of everything" to teach children how to read, depending on the types of students, their ability, motivation, and needs. They seemed to have a more pragmatic view on how to teach reading, using whatever approach that works.

> Whole language is wonderful though, I don't think it's the only way to teach reading. We have been teaching children to read for a long time without whole language, you know. I know I learned to read with the look-and-say approach, and I learned how to read very well, OK? Then we went through a lot of phonics, it's very boring, but you can teach children to read that way if you have to. And then we went slowly and began the transition to pull the best of both those methods. Our children have to learn some sight words, how to sound them out, and they just have to memorize them. You have to use a little bit of everything. (Teacher #4)

> I don't think there is any clear-cut approach to reading instruction. That is one of the problems, I think, we want to mind too much. There is too many different techniques. . . . I think schools should be more adapted toward children having choices. ... We need to find out more about what a child needs and move him in that direction. You can't have one way of teaching reading. You have to see just what is working. (Teacher #12)

Hypothesis 1: Students in classrooms with teachers who have a whole language theoretical orientation as indicated by TORP will have a more positive reading attitude as assessed by ERAS than students in classrooms with teachers who have a phonics or skills orientations.

To test this hypothesis, students' scores on the ERAS were computed and compared by teacher's theoretical orientation to reading indicated by TORP. Table 6 summarizes students' ERAS scores by teacher's theoretical orientation.

Table 6
Students' Mean ERAS Scores By Teacher's Theoretical Orientation

	Class	Cases	Mean	S.D.
Phonics	5	102	63.57	11.46
Skills	5	94	60.06	12.00
Whole Language	5	88	62.25	12.37
Total	15	284	62.00	11.97

Since the intact classrooms were used in the study, a one-factor hierarchical analysis of variances procedure was conducted, using classroom as the unit of analysis. The results of ANOVA of students' ERAS scores by teacher's theoretical orientation are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Summary of One-Factor Hierarchical ANOVA of Students' ERAS Scores By Teacher's Theoretical Orientation

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F
Orientation	214.75	2	107.37	.21
Class/Orientation	6168.25	12	514.02	4.09*
Within Cells	33800.89	269	125.65	
Total	40003.14	283		

* Significant at .05

As indicated in Table 7, there was a significant difference in students' ERAS scores by class within orientation ($F = 4.09$, $p < .05$), but there was no significant difference found in students' ERAS scores by teacher's theoretical orientation ($F = .21$, $p > .05$). This suggests that students' attitude toward reading assessed by ERAS did not differ significantly with respect to teacher's theoretical orientation. Therefore, the hypothesis that students in classrooms with teachers who have a whole language theoretical orientation indicated by TORP will have a more positive reading attitude as assessed by ERAS than students in classrooms with teachers who have a phonics or skills orientations was rejected.

To further explore if there was a linear correlation between teachers' theoretical orientation to reading and students' reading attitude, a Pearson correlation analysis procedure was conducted, using teachers' TORP scores and students' mean ERAS scores. Table 8 presents teachers' TORP scores, students' mean ERAS scores and standard deviations, and class sizes.

As shown in Table 8, results of the correlational analysis revealed that there was no significant linear correlation between teachers' TORP scores and students' mean ERAS scores ($r = -.21$, $df=13$, $p > .05$). This suggests that there was no relationship between teachers' theoretical orientation to reading and students' reading attitude. This analysis result further supports the rejection of hypothesis one.

Table 8
Teachers' TORP Scores, Students' Mean ERAS Scores, Standard Deviations, and Class Size

	Teachers' TORP	Students' ERAS		Class Size
		Mean	S.D.	
1	48	60.25	9.46	20
2	52	64.57	11.48	14
3	52	66.55	10.64	22
4	58	60.42	12.52	26
5	61	67.00	11.75	20
6	76	64.89	7.40	18
7	81	64.59	8.67	22
8	83	62.50	10.93	12
9	88	59.50	11.03	20
10	93	50.77	14.51	22
11	101	63.36	10.35	25
12	101	72.00	2.83	11
13	102	63.81	13.23	16
14	104	61.58	13.86	19
15	105	53.59	11.68	17

Note: Pearson r = -0.21; df=13; p> .05.

Hypothesis 2: Students in classrooms with teachers who have whole language practices as indicated by CATTOR will have a more positive reading attitude as assessed by ERAS than students in classrooms with teachers who have phonics and skills practices.

To test this hypothesis, students' scores on the ERAS were computed and compared by teacher's reading instructional practice indicated by CATTOR. A one-factor hierarchical analyses of variances procedure was conducted, using classroom as the unit of analyses. Table 9 summarizes students' ERAS scores by teacher's reading instructional practice, and Table 10 presents the results of ANOVA of students' ERAS scores by teacher's practice.

Table 9
Students' ERAS Scores by Teacher's Instructional Practice

	Class	n	Mean	S.D.
Phonics	1	20	67.00	11.75
Skills	10	186	62.34	11.37
Whole Language	4	78	59.91	13.07
Total	15	284	62.00	11.97

Table 10
Summary of One-Factor Hierarchical ANOVA of Students' ERAS Scores by Teacher's Instructional Practice

Source of Variance	SS	DF	MS	F
Practice	287.10	2	143.55	.29
Class/Practice	5915.15	12	492.93	3.92*
Within Cells	33800.89	269	125.65	
Total	40003.14	283		

* Significant at .05

As indicated in Table 10, there was a significant difference in students' ERAS scores by class within practice ($F = 3.92$, $p < .05$), but there was no significant difference between students' ERAS scores by teacher's instructional practice ($F = .29$, $p > .05$). This means that students' scores on ERAS did not differ significantly with respect to teacher's instructional practice. Therefore, the hypothesis that students in classrooms with teachers who have whole language practices will have a more positive reading attitude as assessed by ERAS than students in classrooms with teachers who have phonics or skills practices was rejected.

Discussion

First-Grade Teachers' Theoretical Orientations to Reading

The majority of the teachers (n = 219, 84.59%) surveyed in this study were found to hold a skills theoretical orientation to reading. They believed that reading was a set of broad components consisting of vocabulary, decoding, grammar, and comprehension and that those reading skills must be taught in isolation through repeated drill and practice. Only a very small number of teachers (n = 8, 3.10%) held a whole language theoretical orientation to reading. They believed that all reading skills were interdependent and interrelated, and that reading instruction should emphasize the integration of learning, speaking, reading, and writing in a meaningful context. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Cavuto (1982) and Levande (1989) who showed that most teachers held a basal/skills theoretical orientation.

As revealed in teacher interviews, a basal reading program was mandated in the school system and the majority of teachers felt they were expected to follow the curriculum guidelines. Classroom observations also indicated that the basal program had a strong skills orientation and most teachers tended to follow the program and prescribed materials strictly step by step. It may be inferred that the type of reading program and curriculum materials the teachers are exposed to and mandated to use, and school administration's expectations have influenced teachers' beliefs about reading and how reading should be taught (Levande, 1989; Martonicik, 1981).

In addition, perhaps the whole language approach is still largely unknown to a large number of first-grade teachers. Those teachers who completed their professional preparation before the whole language philosophy was introduced and beginning teachers whose professional training did not include whole language theory and practice may be unfamiliar with the idea of whole language. Even for teachers who have had some brief in-service training on whole language, they may not yet have a complete understanding, but just piecemeal knowledge about the theory and practice since the whole language philosophy itself is still vague and elusive in the professional literature (Bergeron, 1990).

Relationship Between Teachers' Belief and Practice

The present study found that 60% of the teachers observed in this study, including all five teachers with a skills orientation, were found to be teaching reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientation to reading. This finding is consistent with previous studies supporting a strong theory-practice relationship (Chambers, 1989; Gove, 1981; Watson, 1984; Richardson et al., 1991). That is, most teachers do adhere to their theoretical orientations when teaching reading. On the other hand, 40% of the teachers in this study did not conduct reading instruction consistent with their beliefs. This may suggest that there is a more complex relationship between teachers' theoretical orientation and their reading instruction practice (Duffy & Anderson, 1982; Martonicik, 1981).

Martonicik's (1981) intensive case studies on factors influencing teacher instructional decisions during reading lessons showed that teachers' reading instructional practices were influenced by both external variables such as the type of basal and supplementary materials used and the principal's expectations, and internal variables such as teachers' knowledge and beliefs about reading instruction. External variables, especially the type of materials used seem to be more influential than internal variables on teachers' reading instruction. Also, Duff and Anderson (1982) found that teachers held many non-reading conceptions as well as identifiable theoretical orientations about reading, and that teachers' reading instructional practices tended to be more guided by the non-reading conceptions than by reading conceptions. According to Duffy and Anderson (1982), teachers' conception of reading or theoretical orientation to reading instruction is a "free-floating" element and it comes into play only after being filtered through their non-reading conceptions such as activity flow, prescribed basal program, and student abilities.

It seems clear from teacher interviews conducted as part of this study that the primary reason for the theory-practice incongruence was that many teachers strive to comply with the administration's expectations and the mandated basal reading program in the school system, and that they perceived they had to make their own decisions regarding the selection of reading program and materials. Teachers who were observed using largely

instructional strategies from the skills approach felt that they had no choice in selecting the reading program and materials for reading instruction. The school administration told these teachers what form of reading instruction was expected in their classrooms. These teachers simply followed the teacher's manual strictly step by step. Teachers in this situation also seemed to feel uncomfortable, powerless, and frustrated. In contrast, teachers who were observed teaching reading from the whole language perspective reported that they played a more active role in classroom decision making concerning the selection of reading program and materials. These teachers seemed to have the freedom and support from the school principal and fellow teachers to explore an innovative way to teaching reading in their own classrooms. They tended to take a stronger professional stand on what they believed about reading and how reading should be taught. They felt more empowered, confident, creative, and autonomous.

In this study, the majority (73%) of the teachers observed during the teaching of reading were conducting reading instruction largely using basal/skills strategies. They followed a strict skills lesson format. The teacher first introduced new words prior to reading the story and then asked a series of questions to guide and judge children's comprehension after reading the story. Independent drill and practice on reading skills using workbooks generally followed. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting an estimated 70 to 95% of reading instruction in the United States continues to be driven by commercial basal/skills programs (Hollingworth et al., 1990).

In addition, the present study also found that all teachers, regardless of their theoretical orientations to reading, actually used a variety of instructional strategies to teach reading from all three theoretical perspectives--phonics, skills, and whole language. Perhaps, classroom teachers are pragmatic in their approaches to reading instruction. As some teachers suggested in the interviews, there should be "a combination of everything" rather than a single clear-cut approach to teaching reading. Through classroom experiences, they were able to find out what works and stick with it.

Factors Influencing Teachers' Beliefs about Reading

All teachers regardless of their theoretical orientations to reading and their actual reading instructional practices, consistently identified their own classroom experiences as the single most important influence on what they believed about reading and reading instruction. These teachers reported that through experience they are able to know "what works" and "what doesn't work" regarding reading instruction. This may be well explained by Guskey's model of staff development (Guskey, 1986). According to Guskey's model, significant change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes is likely to take place only after changes in student learning outcomes are evidenced. Practices that are found to work, that is those that a teacher finds useful in helping students attain desired learning outcomes, are likely to be retained, and those that do not work are to be abandoned. Whole language is still too new in Memphis area for teachers to have experienced success. Perhaps this is why there is not yet wide acceptance of whole language.

Students' Reading Attitude

Results of this study revealed no significant difference in students' reading attitude with respect to teachers' theoretical orientation to reading ($F = .21$, $p > .05$) and with respect to teachers' reading instructional practice ($F = .29$, $p > .05$). This finding is inconsistent with previous studies (Eddowes, 1990; Eldredge, 1991; Kasten & Clarke, 1989; Shapiro & White, 1991).

One possible explanation for this is the inconsistency between teacher beliefs about reading and teacher practice. As found in classroom observations, teachers did not necessarily teach reading in a manner consistent with their theoretical orientations to reading. What they believe how reading should be taught is one thing, but how they actually teach reading in the classroom is quite another. In their instructional practices, most teachers actually used a combination of teaching strategies from all three perspectives, phonics, skills, and whole language.

It is also interesting to notice that contrary to previous studies (Eddowes, 1990; Shapiro & White, 1991), in this study, students in the one classroom whose teacher had primarily phonics practices scored the highest on reading attitude and students in the four

classrooms with teachers who had largely whole language practices scored the lowest, although the difference was not statistically significant. A possible reason for this finding is that the phonics program in that particular classroom was very different from other traditional basal programs. As indicated during classroom observations and the interview with the teacher (#5), the phonics program was multi-sensory in its approach and used a lot of music and songs to help children learn phonics rules. In addition, the teacher was very positive and enthusiastic about the program, and it was the teacher who convinced her principal to adopt this program for the school. Perhaps, the novelty, the multi-sensory approach, the natural appeal of music and songs, and the teacher's enthusiasm together had a positive impact on students' reading attitude in this phonics program.

Implications

One of the goals of education reform is to professionalize teaching by encouraging classroom teachers' increased autonomy and decision-making (Isenberg, 1990). However, the majority of teachers in this study were so dependent on others for what they do to teach children how to read. These teachers were forced by administration, evaluation practices concerning teacher promotion and retention, test materials, to follow a set of reading materials and program slavishly, which often denied the intelligence of the teachers and their roles as active conceptualizers, decision-makers, and implementers. If classroom teachers are to be viewed as "thoughtful professionals" and assume decision-making roles, if teachers are to regain professionalism in the teaching of reading, they must regain some of the responsibilities for classroom decision-making. School administrations need to give classroom teachers more autonomy and support in decision-making regarding the selection and use of reading materials and program.

Experience is important to many teachers and reflection on one's teaching is central to teachers' professional growth. When teachers reflect upon instruction, they can analyze the results of their decisions about students. When they reflect on their decision regarding students, students learn better. Thus, teachers have a professional responsibility to reflect on their practice. However, if teachers are to reflect, critical thinking skills must be an essential

component of a teacher's repertoire. For this to happen, administrators and teacher educators must develop strategies to assist teachers in critically examining both their beliefs and reading instructional practices and to facilitate necessary changes.

Although recently trained, the majority of teachers in this study were unaware of the whole language approach to reading. This is partially due to that training in Memphis on whole language is relatively new. Only in the mid-80s was whole language introduced to the district. Teachers cannot be expected to implement what they do not know. The idea of whole language reflects recent knowledge and understanding about how children learn to read. Teachers need time to be introduced to and to master this new concept. Hence, teacher education programs should include whole language theory and its practical applications in reading instruction so prospective and practicing teachers can become aware of an alternative approach to reading instruction.

Any teacher educational program must focus on beliefs, theories, strategies, and teaching behaviors if authentic changes are to occur. As evidenced in classroom observations and interviews, some teachers tried to use a whole language practice, such as encouraging students to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word, but their attempts were weak and ineffectual because they did not have an understanding of the supporting theory. Likewise, some teachers who showed an interest in the idea of whole language did not know the practical strategies that would allow them to act upon those beliefs. Perhaps, genuine changes will happen when teachers think differently about what is going on in their classrooms and are provided with the practice to match the different ways of thinking.

In essence, this study seems to indicate that the provision of practical strategies without theory may lead to misimplementation or no implementation at all, unless teachers' beliefs are congruent with the theoretical assumptions of the practice. Further, programs focusing on changing beliefs and discussing theory without proposing practices that embody those theories may lead to frustration. Richardson, et al. (1991) suggests that for any teacher training program to be effective, it should weave together

> ... three forms of knowledge: teachers' background theories, beliefs and understandings of the reading process; theoretical frameworks and empirical premises as derived

> from current research; and alternative practices that instantiate both teachers' beliefs and research knowledge (p. 579).

Most teachers observed in this study actually used various instructional strategies from different perspectives, and several teachers interviewed suggested that there should be a combination of approaches to reading instruction depending on student needs, abilities, and even teachers, instead of just one clear-cut approach for all students. Inasmuch as the school administration was so concerned regarding the selection of reading materials and program in the school system, the administration may need to select a variety of reading programs rather than a single approach and make them all accessible to teachers so that classroom teachers can make necessary adaptations to individual situations. Also, teacher training programs should expose prospective and practicing teachers to various reading instructional strategies from different perspectives instead of endorsing only one theory and practice derived from it for all teachers and students.

In addition, because teacher's classroom experiences have profound impact on teachers' beliefs about reading and reading instruction, it may be a good practice to pair experienced teachers with less experienced or beginning teachers so that the experienced teacher can serve as a mentor. Opportunities should be created and provided for teachers to exchange ideas and share experiences.

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